

Draft Minutes

25th August, 2010, at 2.30 pm
Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Stone

Present: **Representing Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority**
Councillor Brigadier Jones;
Representing Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Councillor West;
Representing Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Councillor Bloomer;
Representing Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Boad and Hobbs;
Representing West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
Councillors Alden, Hinton and Jones.

Advisors:

Chief Fire Officer Dartford (Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service);
Chief Fire Officer Randeniya (West Midlands Fire Service);
Chief Fire Officer Raymond (Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service);
Chief Fire Officer Smith (Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service);
Chief Fire Officer Yates (Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service);
Stuart Kellas (Treasurer); Sue Phelps (Clerk) and Georgina Wythes (Sandwell MBC).

Apologies: Councillors Bean, Chattaway and D Taylor

1/10 **Election of Chair**

Resolved that Councillor Brigadier Jones be elected Chair of the Regional Management Board for 2010/11.

2/10 **Election of Vice Chair(s)**

Resolved that Councillors Bloomer, Hinton, Hobbs and West, as Chairs of their respective Fire Authorities, be elected Vice Chairs of the Regional Management Board for 2010/11.

3/10 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd July, 2009, be confirmed as a correct record.

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4/10 **Notes of the Programme Board**

The Board noted the proceedings of the meeting of the Programme Board held on 23rd April, 2009.

5/10 **Membership of the Regional Management Board 2010/11**

The Clerk reported on the membership of the Regional Management Board for 2010/11. It was noted that Councillor S Boad had replaced Councillor C Davis as representative of Warwickshire County Council.

6/10 **Future of the West Midlands Regional Management Board**

The Clerk reported that the Fire Minister had announced the opportunity for Fire Authorities to review the need for a formal Regional Management Board in each region.

The West Midlands Regional Management Board had been established in 2004 as an advisory committee constituted under Section 102(1)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 by agreement between the five constituent fire and rescue authorities, in response to a mandatory requirement of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework.

The Clerk submitted a paper outlining the options available to the Board: to maintain the status quo; to dissolve the Board; or to increase the activity of the Board.

Under the agreement between the five constituent authorities, an individual fire and rescue authority could terminate its participation in the Board by giving one year's notice to expire on 31st March of the following year. The Board had no assets or employees so if there was mutual consent to dissolve the Board, the process of winding up should be straightforward, subject to the consent of the Secretary of State. The Board might also wish to consider varying the Agreement to bring about a shorter notice period which would require the approval of constituent authorities. A dissolution date of 31st December 2010 was suggested.

The Chair indicated that dissolution would not detract from the excellent work already done by the Board, and should not lessen the requirement for continued close liaison between the five fire and rescue services in the West Midlands. He proposed that biannual meetings be held between Chairs and Chief Fire Officers of the constituent authorities.

Councillor Hinton felt that the opportunity for fire authorities to work together voluntarily was the way forward. He noted that this Regional Management Board had been at the forefront of regional working. Close liaison between the five West Midlands fire authorities needed to continue, particularly in the difficult financial situation ahead.

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Mr Dartford indicated that this Board had worked well because it had built on the success of its predecessor, the voluntary West Midlands Fire Authorities Forum. The regional Chief Fire Officers' Association had already aligned its workstreams with those of the Board and could take its project work forward. He stressed the financial imperative to capture efficiencies that could be achieved through voluntary collaborative working.

Councillor West agreed that the work of this Board had been at the forefront of the regional initiative. He emphasised the need to obtain formal approval from the Secretary of State to any dissolution as the requirement to have a regional management board was still a mandatory requirement of the National Framework. The Clerk reassured members that obtaining the approval of the Secretary of State would be one of the actions taken as part of the closedown, if that was the Board's decision.

Councillor Hobbs was in favour of dissolution but emphasised the need for Chairs/portfolio holders in constituent authorities to ensure that Chief Fire Officers were pushing ahead with collaborative working and to monitor the effectiveness of that work. He added that opportunities for collaboration outside the Region should also be taken up if they were advantageous.

Mr Randeniya indicated that the regional Chief Fire Officers' Association could fill the gap left if the Board were to be dissolved, and would provide assurance that collaboration would continue. He acknowledged that the Board had produced excellent results, particularly on the operational side. He indicated that the opportunity to work with other partners, possibly the police or ambulance service, would provide further opportunities for efficiencies.

A motion to proceed with dissolution of the Board was put, seconded and unanimously approved as follows:

Resolved to recommend to the region's Fire and Rescue Authorities that they agree to dissolve the West Midlands Regional Management Board and that they give delegated powers to their Chief Fire Officers in consultation with the Chairs of Authorities, to take all necessary steps to achieve the dissolution of the West Midlands Regional Management Board at the earliest practical date, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State.

7/10

Programme Plan

In view of the decision set out in Minute No 6/10 above, this item was withdrawn.

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8/10 **Governance Arrangements 2010/11**

In view of the decision set out in Minute No 6/10 above, this item was withdrawn.

9/10 **2009/10 Accounts**

The Treasurer reminded Members that following discussions during 2008 with the Audit Commission as to the need for and nature of the external audit required by statute of WMRMB activities, the Audit Commission had concluded that the Board fell within regulations covering 'small bodies with no financial transactions' and as such, external auditors needed to be appointed to carry out a light touch audit with no fee.

Clement Keys had been appointed as the Board's external auditor for the financial years 2007/08 to 2010/11. An agreement was reached in 2008 with Clement Keys that the completion of a 'Short Form Annual Return' together with formal public advertisement of that satisfied the statutory audit needs and no further work would be required. A copy of the return was submitted.

Members were informed that the formal public advertisement would be published in the Birmingham Post following this meeting.

Resolved that the 2009/10 Short Form Annual Return be approved.

(Meeting ended at 2.47 pm)

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